

**For information
16 July 2015**

**Subcommittee on Three Regulations Relating to
Control Regime for the Import of Eggs (Subcommittee)**

**Response to Issues Raised by
Subcommittee Members on 30 June 2015**

PURPOSE

This paper provides the supplementary information sought by Members at the Subcommittee meeting held on 30 June 2015 about the number of eggs imported into Hong Kong.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION SOUGHT

(a) The respective numbers of eggs imported by land, water and air in each of the past three years and the percentages of these eggs

2. According to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, the numbers of eggs imported into Hong Kong by land, water and air in each of the past three years are tabulated as follows :-

| Transportation mode | No. of eggs imported (in millions) | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| Entry point by land | 783 (35.7%) | 658 (29.3%) | 759.5 (33.3%) |
| Entry point by air | 13 (0.6%) | 15 (0.7%) | 19.5 (0.8%) |
| Entry point by water | 1396 (63.7%) | 1569 (70%) | 1503 (65.9%) |
| Total | 2192 | 2242 | 2282 |

(b) The respective numbers of samples taken from eggs imported by land, water and air, and locally produced in each of the past three years by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) for testing and the percentages of these samples

3. The primary aim of Hong Kong's Food Surveillance Programme is to ensure safety of food consumed by the community. The requested

statistics are set out in the table attached below. It is important to bear in mind the following points when interpreting the figures –

- (a) Currently, there is no statutory import control on eggs. Surveillance on eggs and egg products is conducted using a risk-based approach for different hazards;
- (b) Most restaurants, food stores and consumers procure food at the wholesale/retail levels;
- (c) Food at the wholesale/retail levels cover imports by all routes (land, sea and air); and
- (d) Under a risk-based approach, CFS takes samples of eggs from different places of origin. Statistics-keeping is operationally oriented. There is no separate breakdown of food samples collected at the sea route control point primarily because CFS does not operate any control point at the Kwai Chung Container Port at present. This does not mean that no food items (including poultry eggs) imported by sea are sampled for testing¹. It is however impossible to keep detailed statistics of all items including those that are not subject to any specific control regime (Please also see paragraph 6 below).

| | No. of egg samples collected for testing | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | Total |
| Total | 591 | 494 | 479 | 1564 |
| of which | | | | |
| sampled at air entry point | 38 (6.4%) | 55 (11.1%) | 39 (8.1%) | 132 (8.4%) |
| sampled at land control point | 236 (39.9%) | 186 (37.7%) | 103 (21.5%) | 525 (33.6%) |
| sampled at wholesale/retail levels | 317 (53.6%) | 253 (51.2%) | 337 (70.4%) | 907 (58%) |

¹ CFS makes reference to the manifest data the Customs and Excise Department provides as CFS formulates its risk-based surveillance approach. Besides, importers also provide relevant information to CFS which then contacts the relevant importers for inspection at their warehouses.

FOOD SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME

4. Taking samples of eggs imported into Hong Kong forms part of the Food Surveillance Programme of CFS, which monitors food on sale in Hong Kong to ensure its compliance with legal requirements and fitness for human consumption. CFS takes food samples (including eggs) at the import, wholesale and retail levels and adopts a risk-based principle in determining the types of samples to be collected, the frequency, number and locations of samples taken for testing, and the types of laboratory analysis to be conducted.

5. The sampling programme is under regular review by CFS, taking into account factors such as past food surveillance results, local and overseas food developments and incidents (such as the recent allegations of parallel trading of selected food items like vegetables and frozen meat) as well as relevant risk analysis. In general, CFS conducted tests on a total of about 64,000 food samples every year, i.e. about nine samples per 1,000 persons of the population of Hong Kong. This is a relatively high testing rate when compared with other overseas economies (ranging from under one in the U.K. to 9.6 samples per 1000 persons in Singapore).

6. In addition, we also take action to enhance the Food Surveillance Programme in view of the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Specifically regarding the import control over eggs, importers shall obtain a prior written permission from a health officer of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department under the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry (Amendment) Regulation 2015, before importing eggs into Hong Kong. In doing so, the importer shall provide information the health officer considers essential to ensure traceability of the eggs imported including the type and quantity of the eggs to be imported, as well as other details of the consignments, such as the expected date of arrival, means of transport, container number and so on. In addition, the import of eggs must be accompanied by a health certificate (as recommended by the OIE) issued by an issuing entity of the place of origin recognised by the Director of Environmental Hygiene, certifying that the eggs are fit for human consumption. The proposed statutory regime over import of eggs will enable CFS to obtain more timely, accurate and detailed information about the import of eggs prior to their arrival at Hong Kong, regardless of the means of transport, which would facilitate CFS to conduct its surveillance more effectively.

7. Moreover, we would also deploy resources to enhance our regulatory regime and strengthen the Food Surveillance Programme. A case in point is the proposed regulation of edible fats and oils and “waste cooking oils” in respect of which the Government has recently launched a consultation exercise. CFS also reviews the operational details including sampling strategy in the light of prevailing food incidents, e.g. concerns about use of pesticides in tea leaves and other farm produce.

8. In particular, with respect to surveillance and sampling at the sea control point, noting recent incidents relating to the import of some Japanese carrots from Chiba in breach of the CFS’s import restrictions via the sea route, allegations of imports of frozen meat that has long passed its expiry/best by dates, as well as the future implementation of the statutory control regime on the import of eggs, the CFS has been proactively exploring ways to strengthen the inspection of food consignments imported into Hong Kong by sea. This includes, among other things, discussions with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) the proposed setting up of a food inspection check point at the container terminals for testing food products imported by sea, with a view to enhancing the inspection of these products to further safeguard food safety.

ADVICE SOUGHT

9. Members are invited to note the supplementary information provided above.

**Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Centre for Food Safety**

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